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Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Letter dated 17 April 2007 from the Permanent Representatives of Belgium, Benin and France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On 2 and 3 April 2007, the Government of Benin and the Governments of Belgium and France jointly organized a seminar that brought together nine French-speaking countries of West and Central Africa in order to consider the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

We have the honour to transmit herewith the report on their very constructive discussions (see annex). We should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 113 and we hope that it will contribute to the forthcoming intergovernmental discussion on this crucial aspect of the reform of the Organization.

(*Signed*) Johan **Verbeke**

(*Signed*) Jean-Marie **Ehouzou**

(*Signed*) Jean-Marc **de La Sablière**

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Annex to the letter dated 17 April 2007 from the Permanent Representatives of Belgium, Benin and France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

International Seminar on the Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment

Cotonou, 2 and 3 April 2007, Benin Marina Hotel

General report

The International Seminar on the Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment was held at the Benin Marina Hotel, Cotonou, on 2 and 3 April 2007.

It was organized jointly by the Government of Benin and the Governments of Belgium and France with the assistance of the United Nations system focal point in Cotonou and brought together representatives of nine countries of West and Central Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo), as well as experts from these countries' permanent missions in New York and officials of United Nations bodies.

I. Context and objective of the Seminar

In accordance with the directives of Heads of State and Government contained in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, adopted at the World Summit held in New York from 14 to 16 September 2005, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, established in February 2006 a panel of eminent international personalities to assist him in considering the system-wide coherence of United Nations action. The High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, which is co-chaired by the Prime Ministers of Mozambique, Pakistan and Norway, submitted its report to the Secretary-General on 9 November 2006.

According to this report, entitled "Delivering as one", bold reforms are needed to improve the effectiveness of the operational activities of the United Nations system and to assist countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

At present, the United Nations system has 14 funds and programmes, 17 specialized agencies, 5 research institutes, 9 functional commissions and 5 regional commissions. On many levels, the system has suffered from a fragmentation and weakening that are detrimental to its effective functioning.

The High-level Panel's report puts forward a series of recommendations to overcome the fragmentation of the United Nations so that the system can deliver as one to serve the needs of all countries in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals.

In view of the potential impact of implementation of the recommendations on the United Nations system as a whole, Mr. Kofi Annan suggested that Member States should establish a process of informal dialogue to enable them to reach a common understanding of the report's objectives, contents and proposals.

The aim of the Cotonou meeting was to promote greater familiarity with and understanding of the High-level Panel's report with a view to enabling the countries concerned to prepare their positions for the forthcoming discussions on implementation of the recommendations.

II. Organization and conduct of work

Three statements were made at the Seminar's opening ceremony:

- Introductory remarks by Mr. Roland Provot, Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy of Belgium in Cotonou;
- Special address by His Excellency Mr. Christian Daziano, Ambassador of the French Republic to Benin; and
- Opening address by Her Excellency Ms. Mariam Aladji Boni Diallo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Benin.

In accordance with the agenda, the Seminar's discussions were conducted in plenary meetings that were chaired by Ambassador Jacques Adande, former Resident Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Burkina Faso.

The discussions were moderated by Mr. Moustapha Soumare, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System and Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kigali, Rwanda, who was acting in his personal capacity.

The discussions focused on two main themes.

1. Enhancing familiarity with and understanding of the High-level Panel's report through a review of the background to its preparation and its recommendations;

2. Interactive dialogue among participants with a view to facilitating the preparation of national positions.

II.1 Presentations

The presentations, which served as the basis for the ensuing discussions, were given by Mr. Jean-Marc Chataigner, Director of the Department of Strategic Planning and Partnerships of the French Development Agency (AFD), and Mr. Marcus Leroy, Mr. Laurent Pic and Ms. Fernande Houngbedji of the Permanent Missions of Belgium, France and Benin to the United Nations in New York, respectively.

The presentations focused on the following topics in order to promote understanding of the High-level Panel's report:

- The context, challenges and issues of United Nations system reform;

- The content of the High-level Panel's report, including the composition, mandate and methodology of the High-level Panel itself, as well as its recommendations, grouped by topic or sector and level of decision-making, including an indication of the stakeholders involved;
- The national experiences of pilot countries, including Rwanda and Cape Verde, which have already been involved in the "delivering as one" process through the One Country Programme.

II.2 Interactive discussions

Following the above-mentioned presentations, most of the work was interactive in nature and comprised rich and fruitful informal discussions.

These discussions focused on the following four main areas of interest:

1. The role of the United Nations;

2. Financing and aid modalities;

3. Reform of the institutional architecture of the operational activities of the United Nations system;

4. Partnership between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions.

The following ideas emanated from the discussions:

Perception of the role of the United Nations

1. Undoubtedly, the United Nations system represents a key instrument of international development cooperation in the service of international peace and security. However, due to the numerous and rapid changes in international political and economic life, the United Nations must change and continually adapt to the international environment in order to effectively meet the ever-increasing and multifaceted contemporary challenges and development needs of Member States;

2. The activities of the United Nations must be reorganized with a view to achieving concrete and quantifiable results on the ground that have a noticeable impact on improving the living conditions of grass-roots communities;

3. Any reform of the United Nations will be sustainable and viable only if it has a compelling rationale and if suitable national capacities for implementation and monitoring have been found to exist;

4. With respect to the implementation of the "delivering as one" principle, the One Country Programmes will be sustainable only with political leadership and ownership by the beneficiary countries, on the one hand, and the involvement of all parties, including the Government, the United Nations system and development partners, on the other, in the framework of an inclusive and productive tripartite partnership;

5. The development of the One Country Programmes should not under any circumstances consist of merely juxtaposing the agency programmes developed to date, but should represent the result of an integrated and holistic approach that aims to provide viable, multisectoral responses to the development problems of the countries concerned;

6. There is an urgent need to take suitable measures to enhance the harmonization and efficiency of the United Nations system on the ground. This harmonization and rationalization of United Nations activities should include a vertical dimension that covers coordination between country offices and agency headquarters, in addition to a horizontal dimension that involves uniting the efforts of the system's different components at the country level;

7. The harmonization of the activities of United Nations agencies also calls for harmonization of the disbursement and monitoring procedures of the various development partners that contribute to their financing;

Financing and aid modalities

8. Mechanisms for mobilizing development resources should ensure the predictability of resource flows. In addition, they should include a degree of flexibility that allows resources to be redeployed if required;

9. Most development resources should be devoted directly to operational activities on the ground, not to the administrative structures of the agencies responsible for implementing them;

10. In the framework of the One Country Programmes it is necessary to improve the way development programmes are funded in order to achieve the following objectives:

- To maintain and even increase the level of official development assistance (ODA) and to avoid the potential risk of a system of aid conditionalities that might be detrimental to the development process; and
- To ensure that resources are used for the priorities identified by the beneficiary countries;

Reform of the institutional architecture of the operational activities of the United Nations system

11. The establishment of new entities within the United Nations system should be contingent upon and dictated by the demonstrated added value that these structures provide on the ground;

12. The definition of the different regions by the agencies of the United Nations system should be harmonized;

13. The regionalization of activities should be based on objective criteria and the judicious selection of locations for regional offices. These offices and the regional commissions could play a key role in promoting South-South cooperation;

Partnership between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions

14. In the interest of efficiency, greater efforts should be made to ensure the coherence of development activities carried out by various actors of the international community, including within the United Nations system and with the Bretton Woods institutions.

Following the discussions, the participants unanimously:

1. Expressed their gratitude to the Governments of Benin, Belgium and France and to UNDP for organizing the International Seminar on the Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment;

2. Stressed the need for ongoing coordination and exchanges of information and for the harmonization of views between permanent missions in New York and national structures involved in cooperation with the United Nations system;

3. Also expressed the need to establish criteria for evaluating the implementation of the One Country Programmes in the pilot countries and to ensure the ongoing assessment and exchange of information during the experimental phase by publicizing the achievements, difficulties encountered and measures taken in response to these difficulties;

4. Recommended, as suggested by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the continuation of the process of informal dialogue at all levels with a view to facilitating a convergence of ideas or consensus on the proposals contained in the High-level Panel's report;

5. Recommended the dissemination of the results of the Cotonou Seminar among the permanent missions to the United Nations in New York and the holding of outcome seminars in the various capitals;

6. Encouraged all Member States to become actively involved, in a timely manner, in the negotiation process on the follow-up to the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

IV. Completion of work

The Seminar's discussions were completed with a closing ceremony, which included a presentation of the results of the Seminar by Ambassador Jacques Adande, Chairman of the Seminar, and an address by Ambassador Raymond C. Vignikin, Deputy Chef de Cabinet, representing Ms. Mariam Aladji Boni Diallo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Benin, who was unable to attend.

Done at Cotonou on 3 April 2007.